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BRUNO CHAP BOOKS

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ROBERT CRACKANTHORPE

PIGNETTES

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**EDITED BY GUIDO BRUNO IN HIS GARRET ON
WASHINGTON SQUARE, NEW YORK**

May 1915

Fifteen Cents

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Series

BRUNO CHAP BOOKS.

Vol. 1

MAY 1915

No. 8

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THE body of Mr. Crackanthorpe, when found in the Seine, had probably been in the water for six weeks. The face was not recognizable, and his brothers were only able to identify him by his linen and a sleeve-link, with which they were familiar. The theory of suicide is the popular one, but there are those who think that the young man met with foul play.

He was a son of Mr. Montague Crackanthorpe (formerly Montague Cookson), Q. C., D. C. L., his mother being the Mrs. Crackanthorpe whose essays on social subjects, such as "The Revolting Daughters", have been widely discussed. Born on May 12, 1870, Mr. Hubert Crackanthorpe married, on Feb. 14, 1893, Leila, younger daughter of the late Mr. R. J. Somerled Macdonald, a descendant of Flora Macdonald. She is a grand-daughter of the late Rt. Hon. Sir William Grove, and known in the literary world as a contributor to "The Yellow Book" and "The Savoy." Mr. Hubert Crackanthorpe had done literary work of a strange sort. His "Wreckage", a volume of stories, went rapidly into a second edition, and his last book, "Vignettes", received many favorable notices in England.

—*The Critic*, Jan. 9, 1897

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R. Crackanthorpe was just and refined, never forcing the note; there are delicacy, distinction, discretion in his quiet fearlessness of manner. He makes no researches into the black mire of life, resolved to be at all costs a master in the science and secrets of the sewer. The brief stories of "Wreckage", written in so fresh and pure an English, so crisp a style, are uniformly sad, but of no sickening sadness; no scene is drawn, no character imagined, no phrase chosen for its naked horror of ugliness or gloom. Take "The Struggle For Life." In less than six pages we have the story of a poor woman selling herself in the street for the pittance which will buy her starving babies food, while her brutal husband riots with prostitutes in a pothouse. We say with Rosetti that "it makes a goblin of the sun." Let us also say with him:

"So it is, my dear.
All such things touch secret strings
For heavy hearts to hear.
So it is, my dear."

The terrible rapid pages are full of an aching poignancy. The straightforward sentences hide an inner appeal. The telling of the misery becomes a thing of dreadful beauty and its intensity goes nearer to the heart of the whole dark matter than many a moving sermon. The artists' abstemiousness in Mr. Crackanthorpe, the refinement of his reticence, never chilled his reader. "The pity of it! The pity of it!" That was the unspoken yet audible burden of his art.

Mr. Crackanthorpe had three chief gifts: skill in dramatic narration—a sense of situation, a lively feeling for the value and interpretation of gesture, posture, circumstance; secondly, analytic skill in the conception and presentation of character; thirdly, descriptive and pictorial power, readiness of vision, with a faculty of sifting and selecting its reports.

His longest performance, the last story in the posthumous "Last Studies" shows that he had it in him to use all his gifts harmoniously upon an ample scale; but it is probable that stories upon the scale of "A Conflict of Egoisms" in Wreckage, of "Battledore and Shuttlecock" in Sentimental Studies, and of the masterly "Trevor Perkins" in Last Studies, would have remained the happiest and most distinctive channels of his art.

Lionel Johnson in Acad, Mar. 20, 1897.

WE seem to see in Hubert Crackanthorpe not only a very interesting, but a positively touching case of what may be called reaction against an experience of puerilities judged, frankly, inane, and a proportionate search, on his own responsibility and his own ground, for some artistic way of marking the force of the reaction.

To have known him, however little, was to decline to wonder perhaps how a boyishness superficially so vivid could bend itself to this particular vehicle, feel the reality of the thousand bribes to pessimism, see as salient the side of life that is neither miraculous coincidence, nor hairbreadth escape nor simplified sentiment, nor ten thousand a year.

What appealed to him was the situation that asked for a certain fineness of art and that could best be presented in a kind of foreshortened picture: the possibilities of some phase, in especial, of a thoroughly personal relation, a relation the better the more intimate and demanding, for objective intensity, some degree of composition and reduction.

Henry James, preface to last studies.

To Hubert Crackanthorpe

HUBERT, who loved the country and the town,
Has left his friends; and England sees no more
The young, slight figure, musing on the down,
Nor France his quiet eyes, that o'er and o'er
Traveled her landscape, shaping it so well.
His joys were there, but pity for mankind
Drew him where surging cities moved his soul:
He wrote of men and women, wrecked and pined
With bitter sorrow; and the misery stole
Into his life till he bade life farewell.
Pity he could not stay, for he was true,
Tender and chivalrous, and without spot;
Loving things great and good, and love like dew
Fell from his heart on those that loved him not;
But those that loved him knew that he loved well.
Too rough his sea, too dark its angry tides!
Things of a day are we; shadows that move
The lands of shadow; but, where he abides,
Time is no more; and that great substance, Love,
Is shadowless. And yet, we grieve. Farewell.

Stopford A. Brooke

VIGNETTES

*from the Saturday Review
hitherto uncollected.*

TO the loyal friends of my beloved son,
who saw in the unfolding flower of
his manhood a renewal of the bright promise of his early youth, I dedicate, for an abiding remembrance, these last fragments of his interrupted work.

Blanche Alathea Crackanthorpe.

Tout paysage est un état d'âme.

THE English Midlands, sluggishly affluent, a massy profusion of well-upholstered undulations; Normandy, coquettish, almost dapper, in its discreet rusticity, its finnikin spruceness, its distinguished reticence of detail; the plains of Lombardy in midsummer, all glutted with luscious vegetation; Naples, flaunting her blatant, Southern splendour; Switzerland, tricked out in cheap sentimentality, in a catchpenny crudity of tone; Andalusia, savagely harsh, with its bitter, exasperated colouring

In every country there lurks a personality, and the contemplation of the memory of the lands where one has lived, of the books one has cherished, of the women one has loved, brings with it a strange sense of the incomprehensible promptings of caprice.

With the fluctuations of mood, Musset seems puerile or passionate; Amiel, lachrymose or exquisitely sensitive; Baudelaire, *macabre* or impassively statuesque; Browning, turgid or ruggedly splendid; Pater, turtuous or infinitely dexterous; Meredith, irksome or gorgeously prismatic.

In love, a naive philosopher once declared, "Il n'y a que les commencements qui sont charmants." There are women whom we worshipped years ago, who would certainly fail to move us today; books that enthralled us in childhood, which we hesitate to open again; places we had read of with delight and for that reason shrink from surveying

And so tonight, beneath the lime-tree, by the dog-rose hedge, whilst the grasshoppers scrape their ceaseless chorus, and the flies roam like specks of gold, and the fawn-coloured cattle stalk home from the pastures, I wonder dreamily how I have come to love so steadfastly the whole wayward grace of the countryside—the melancholy of its wide plains, burnt to dun colour by the Southern sun; the desolate silences of those dark, endless pine forests that lie beyond; the hesitating contours of the wooded slopes; the distant Pyrenees, a long ragged, snow-capped wall; the dazzling-white roads, stretching between their tall, slim poplars straight towards the horizon; the tumbled-down, white-faced villages, huddled on the hilltops; their battered, sloping roofs, tilted all awry, like loose-

fitting, peaked cape of faded-red tiles; the farmyards, strewn with dingy oxbedding, and littered with a decrepit multitude of objects, which, it seems, can never have been new—broken earthenware pots, rickety rush-bottomed chairs, stacks of dead branches, still rustling in their brown, winter leaves; the slow-paced oxen ploughing the land; the peasants, men, women and children swaying in line as they sow the maize, with the poultry pecking behind; the jangling bells of the dilapidated, yellow-wheeled courier; the marked-days, the sea of the blue berets, the press of the blue blouses, the incoherent, waving of ox-goads, the bristling of curved horns, the shifting mass of sleek, fawn-coloured backs; the narrow, ramshackle streets of the town; the line of plane-trees on the *place d'armes*, beneath which groups of grave *bourgeois* are forever pacing; and the Gave, spurting over the rocks, under the old Norman bridge

The sun slips behind a bank of inky cloud, slowly trailing its pale-green stain, and the old, penetrating charm of this tiny corner of the earth returns, and the old longing to bind myself to it, to have my place in its life, always, through the years to come

The oxen have gone their way along the road; the lengthy twilight shadows steal across the garden; from the church-spire up on the hill the Angelus rings out; quite near at hand a tree-frog starts piping his shrill, clear note, and the cockchafers their angry whirling; and then, of a sudden, the violet night has fallen, wrapping all earth and sky in her mysterious, impenetrable blackness

IT was New Year's Eve. The old scene. A London night; a heavy-brown atmosphere splashed with liquid golden lights; the bustling market-place of sin; a silent crowd of black figures drifting over a wet flickering pavement.

The slow, grave notes from a church tower took command of the night. The last one faded; the old year had slipped by. And then a woman laughed—a strident, level laugh; and there swept through all the crowd a mad feverish tremor. The women ran one to the other, kissing, wildly welcoming the New Year in; and the men, shouting thickly, snatched at them as they ran. And the cabmen touted eagerly for fares.

Across the road, by a corner, a street missionary stood on a chair—an undersized, poorly clad man, with a wizened bearded face.

... "Repent . . . repent . . . and save your souls tonight from the eternal torments of hell fire" . . .

The women jostled him, pelted him with fond jibes; and one—a young girl—broke into a peal of hysterical laughter.

And I mused wondering on the ugliness of sin.

REVERIE.

I dreamed of an age grown strangely picturesque—of the rich enfeebled by monotonous ease; of the shivering poor clamoring rightly for justice; of a helpless democracy, vast revolt of the illinformed; of priests striving to be rational; of sentimental moralists protecting iniquity; of middle-class princes; of sybaritic saints; of complacent and pompous politicians; of doctors hurrying the degeneration of the race; of artists discarding possibilities for limitations; of pressmen befooling a pretentious public; of critics refining upon the busman's methods; of inhabitants of Camberwell chattering of culture; of ladies of the pavement aping the conventionality of Nonconformist circles.

And I dreamed of this great, dreamy London of ours; of her myriad fleeting moods; of the charm of her portentous provincialty; and I awoke all a-glad and hungering for life

THE FIVE SISTER PANSIES.

THESE are their names—Carlotta, Lubella, Belinda, Aminta, Clarissa. By the old bowling-green they stand, a little pompously perhaps, with a slight superfluity of dignity, conscious of their own full, comely contours—a courtly group of rotund dames. Heavy Carlotta, the eldest, lover of blatant luxury, overblown, middle-aged, in her gown of rich magenta, all embroidered with tawdry gilt; Lubella, wearing portly velvet of dark purple, sensual, indolent, insolent as an empress of old, gleaming her thin, yellow eye; insignificant Belinda, bedecked in silly sentimental mauve, all for dallying with the facile gossip of gallanterie, gushing, giggling, gullible; unsophisticated Aminta, with tresses of flaming gold, amiable and obvious as a common stage heroine; and Clarissa, the youngest, slyly smirking the while, above her frock of milk-white innocence.

IN THE LANDES.

SINCE sunrise I had been traveling—along the straight-stretching roads, white with summer sand, interminably striped by the shadows of the poplars, across the great, parched plain, where, all the day's length, the heat dances over the waste land, and the cattle bells float their far-away tinkling; through the desolate villages, empty but for the beldames, hunched in the doorways, pulling the flax with horny, tremulous fingers; and on towards the desolate silence of the flowerless pine-forests

And there the night fell. The sun went down unseen; a dim flickering ruddled the host of tree-trunks, and the darkness started to drift through the forest. The road grew narrow as a foot-path, and the mare, slackening her pace, uneasily strained her white neck ahead

Out of the darkness a figure sprang beside me. A shout rang out—words of an uncouth *patois* that I did not understand. And the mare terrified, galloped forward, snorting and swerving, from side to side

And a strange superstitious fear crept upon me—a dreamy dread of the future; a helpless presentiment of evil days to come; a sense, too, of the ruthless nullity of life, of the futile deception of effort, of bitter revolt against the extinction of death; a yearning after faith in some vague survival beyond

And the words of the old proverb returned to me mockingly, "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear with hearing."

SPRING IN BEARN.

OF a sudden it seems to have come—the poplars, fluttering their golden-green; the fruit-trees tricked out in fete-day frocks of frail snow-white; the hoary oaks unfurling their baby leaves; and the lanes all littered with golden bloom

The blue flax sways like a sensitive sea; the violets peep from amid the moss; beneath every hedgerow the primroses cluster; and the rivulets tinkle their shrill glad songs

Dense levies of orchisses empurple the meadows, where the butterflies hasten their wavering flight; the sunlight breathes through the pale-leafed woods; and the air is sweet with the scent of the spring, and loud with the humming of wings

It lasts but a week—a fleeting mood of dainty gaiety; a quick discarding of the brown shabbiness of winter for a smiling array of white and gold, fresh-green and turquoise-blue

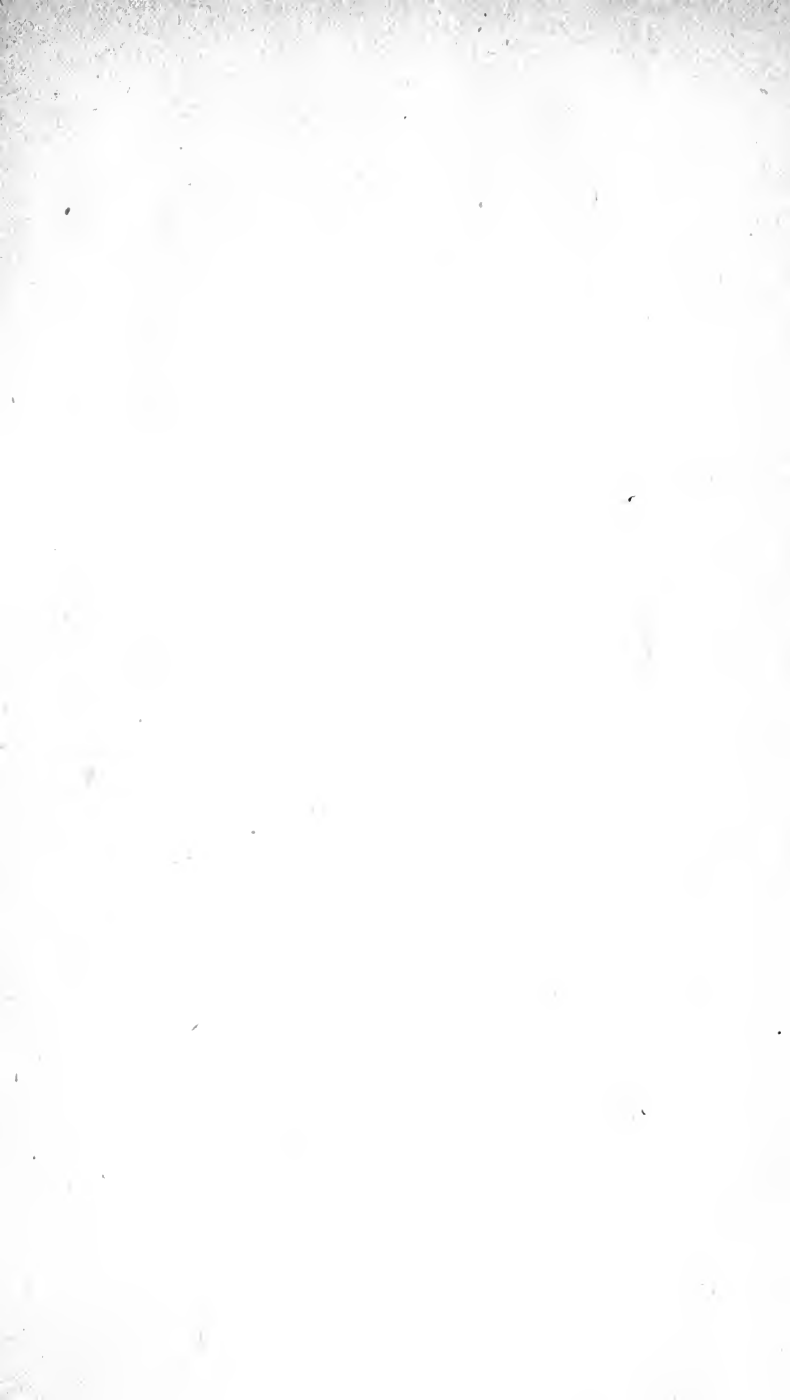
And then, it has flitted, and through the long, parched months relentlessly blazes the summer sun.

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